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XIV.—ROMANTIC ASPECTS OF THE AGE OF POPE<sup>1</sup>

To our ideas of classicism we have, as a rule, given point and definiteness by contrasting it with its opposite, romanticism; and to make the contrast stronger we usually take extreme cases. This is a perfectly proper, perhaps necessary, proceeding. It is also proper and convenient

<sup>1</sup>Since the reading of this paper before the Association last Christmas, Professor W. A. Neilson has published his stimulating *Essentials of Poetry* (Boston, 1912), which treats of many of the matters herein considered. Professor Neilson has phrased admirably a number of the ideas that I have tried to present, as well as a great many that I have not touched on. Yet, as both his purpose and method are different from mine, it has seemed best not to change what I had written. My concern is not to define romanticism or classicism but to study the tastes and interests of the average man of the early eighteenth century and to show that many of the things that have been thought to indicate "the beginnings of romanticism" are to be found in the most classical writers. Professor Neilson's illuminating definitions, *e. g.*, "Classicism is the tendency characterized by the predominance of reason over imagination and the sense of fact," should help in the formation of correct ideas of the period. The word "predominance" is particularly helpful.

to speak of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries as a classical age. The difficulty comes with the next step which our minds and those of our hearers unconsciously, but almost inevitably take, that of assuming that this abstract and extreme classicism was generally held in this classical age. We forget that classicism is one thing and the classicism of the eighteenth century quite a different thing.

It is obvious, as soon as one considers the matter, that there must have been many persons at this time who were not malignantly classical. The English people have always been, if not romantic, at least romantically inclined. They have always been sentimental. The terms "the beginnings" or "the renaissance of English romanticism" are unfortunate misnomers; English romanticism never began because it always was, it never had a new birth because it was never dead. It is true that to a great extent it disappeared from our literature, particularly from our poetry, but this by no means warrants our assuming that it ceased to exist. Such an assumption implies that the life and thought of the early eighteenth century found adequate expression in its poetry, and this it emphatically did not. The more one penetrates beneath the surface and tries to find out what the English people really thought and felt, the deeper must be the conviction that the classicism of the time was a cult, a fad, an artificial taste which grew up under French influence among the more critical. The great body of readers has never been critical, tho it will go a considerable distance in following a fashion. It is probably true that the public taste has never been as classical as it was at this time. People always like a change. Furthermore, readers of the day thoroly enjoyed the smoother, more finisht verses and the

cleverness of the terse, stinging couplets. Of course they admired Pope's genius. Yet they must, at times, have been bored by the most monotonous of English verse forms, have tired of the cleverness of it all, and have longed for the more natural, the more emotional poetry of their fathers.<sup>1</sup> They admired the new poetry much

<sup>1</sup>There is evidence that they did so. Sir Richard Blackmore writes (*Essays upon Several Subjects*, 1716, p. 112), "To avoid the Monotony and Uniformity in finishing the Sense, and giving a Rest at the End of every Couplet, which is tedious and ungrateful to the Reader, the Poet should" use run-over lines and vary his pauses. Samuel Say (*Poems on Several Occasions*, written 1738, pp. 140-1, cf. p. 130) finds even the comparatively free blank verse of Glover too smooth and regular. Young's severe condemnation of the couplet will be found with Prior's stricture on pp. 321 f.; most of the other authors of the period who discuss blank verse have a fling at rime. In his *Remarks on the Beauties of Poetry*, 1762, Daniel Webb quotes eight lines from Pope's *Essay on Man* and observes, "Every ear must feel the ill effect of the monotony in these lines" (p. 7); he examines Pope's pauses and concludes (p. 12, cf. pp. 6, 8) "that the monotony of the couplet does not proceed, as has been imagined, (indicating that others had noticed it) from the repetition of the rimes, but from a sameness in the movement of the verse." Some other heresies to the classical faith may be noted here. So distinguished an authority as the first professor of poetry in Oxford, Joseph Trapp, has not scorned to pour on that pet of the classicists, the pastoral, and even goes so far as to decry the imitation of the ancients (*Praelectiones Poeticae*, 2 vols., 1711-5, 3rd ed., 1736, I, pp. 45, 317-8). Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759) is largely an attack upon this same imitation. "The less we copy the renowned ancients," he writes, "we shall resemble them the more." And again, "Though Pope's noble muse may boast her illustrious descent from Homer, Virgil, Horace; yet is an original author more nobly born" (*Works*, 1798, 3 vols., III, pp. 180, 197). Leonard Welsted attacks another classical stronghold, treatises on poetry: "The truth is, they touch only the externals or form of the thing, without entering into the spirit of it; they play about the surface of Poetry, but never dive into its depths; the secret, the soul of good writing, is not to be come at through such mechanic Laws" (*A Dissertation concerning the Perfection of the English Language*, 1724, *Works*, 1787, p. 129). Similarly,

more than they liked it,—a fact which may have had a good deal to do with the rapid development of the periodical and the novel at this time. The people found in these new forms the emotional expressions for which they had formerly gone to their poetry and drama. The enthusiasm which greeted Thomson's *Seasons*, the delight in Spenser, the popularity of *Paradise Lost*, which, by the middle of the century, was to reach a point it has never held since,—these are but the more striking of the numerous indications of a public taste which was not satisfied with the poetry of the school of Pope. The average Englishman of the time was not naturally of this school; his family traditions, his boyish pleasures, his normal tastes and tendencies, all lay in a different direction. The unsophisticated classes, the tradesmen, the country gentry, practically everyone in fact, except those who lived in a few cities, were anything but Popean.

An interesting confirmation of these statements may be found in some facts pointed out by Miss Myra Reynolds. In her *Nature in English Poetry*<sup>1</sup> she notes that the significant nature poetry of the time was, as a rule, the work of young men living in the country “and, in most cases where there was an extended literary career, the poetry of Nature speedily gave way to work of a didactic or dramatic sort, in which Nature played but a small part.” That is, the natural Englishman was a lover of nature and it was only when he left the country for London and learned what was fashionable that he came

a writer in Dodsley's *Museum* (July 4, 1747, III, pp. 281-6) thinks little of “Instruction . . . Alterations and Improvements” in poetry. “Accuracy and Correctness,” he says, “are without Doubt Advantages . . . but still they are not Essentials . . . Genius . . . is the Essence of Poetry.”

<sup>1</sup>P. 329.

to neglect nature and seek "wit." Englishmen were still strongly tinged with romanticism; they might learn to be ashamed of their feelings and to conceal them, but the feelings were still there and they were bound to appear at times. It is the gleams from this bankt fire of native English taste that the historian of romanticism seizes upon as the rays of the coming dawn. But there was no dawn; for there had been no sunset, merely an eclipse observable in London and its vicinity.

This eclipse was most complete in English poetry. In the other forms of literature, and in the thought and life of the nation as a whole and even of London, there was considerable of the old light still shining. Yet, as we judge the romanticism of a period largely from its poetry, we see little of this light; so that the period seems to us darker than it really was. The principal reason why the temperamental English romanticism is not markt in the poetry of the period is to be found in the dominance of Pope. It was Pope's good fortune to live at a time when there were no other great poets. As a result he was able to dominate the age as he could have done at few other periods of English literature. If, for example, he had been a romanticist contemporary with Wordsworth, Keats, Scott, and Byron, he could never have maintained the supremacy he held in the eighteenth century. At this later period there were several great models to imitate, and he would have had to share his followers with rivals. I do not question that most of the early eighteenth-century poets were predominately classical; but I think that, under the influence of Pope, many of them appear much more classical than they really were. It must be remembered that eighteenth-century poetry was imitative to a degree difficult for us to comprehend. Poets of

establisht rank imitated frankly and sometimes slavishly. They imitated everything, not only *Paradise Lost*, *L'Allegro*, *The Faerie Queene*, Latin satires and georgics, Pope's *Dunciad* and *Epistles*, but Gray's *Elegy*, Collins's *Ode to Evening*, Philips's *Splendid Shilling*, and scores more. One of the greatest poems of the time, *The Castle of Indolence*, is a profest imitation; Milton and Spenser had hundreds of imitators, yet they belonged to a different age. It is a reasonable surmise that if there had been great poets contemporary with Pope, they would have taken many of his followers; and as these poets would naturally have differed from Pope in many respects, as their classicism would not have been his, the poetry of the time might have become in many respects unlike what it is. We have a case somewhat like this supposed one in James Thomson. *The Seasons* was very popular and had a markt influence on poetic form, diction, and subject matter; it tinged the poems which followed it with its more flexible classicism. Had Thomson been recognized as a serious rival to Pope, eighteenth-century poetry would probably have taken a rather different turn. It may be objected that no poet so unlike Pope as Thomson could be considered a serious rival; but this idea, as I have suggested and shall attempt to prove later, is bast on a misunderstanding of the age. Pope was an extreme classicist, a classicist not merely because of a theory or fad but thru instinct and native feeling. It is impossible to conceive him as anything else. Accordingly, he fixt extreme classicism as the fashion; so that his admirers, classicists themselves but of a milder type, tried to curb their freer fancies and be correct.

Another reason why the sway of classicism seems to us more absolute than it really was is that we pay little

attention to the lesser writers of the time. No age can be known adequately by those who seem to posterity its greatest authors. What idea will future students gain of the tastes and interests of the late nineteenth century if they study it only in the novels of George Meredith, Thomas Hardy, and Henry James? *The Ladies' Home Journal*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, *The Rosary* and the librettos of *The Slim Princess* and *The Pink Lady* may be hard reading a hundred years from now, but they will be none the less illuminating. And yet the fact that most readers to-day find the literature of the eighteenth century unattractive, is taken by them as a sufficient excuse for neglecting all but the most important works that comprise it, for hurrying along over the main highways, and paying slight attention to by-paths and abandoned roads. Dryden and Pope we know, some Gay, and Swift, the selections in Ward's *English Poets*, and of course what others have written about these men and the period. We have generalized freely about this literature, yet how many of us have an adequate conception of the popular John Philips, the author of *Cyder*, *The Splendid Shilling*, etc.? of Blackmore's interminable epics? of Garth? of the numerous miscellanies of the time? How many of us have read the poetry and criticism in the early numbers of *The Gentleman's Magazine*? The volumes of verse presented to their majesties on various occasions by the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge have, to me at least, been surprising and illuminating. To be sure, life is short and literature is very long; but have we any right to our confident dogmatizing about this age until we know what the average author wrote and what the average reader liked and read?

Outcroppings of the bed-rock of English romanticism



are also concealed from our eyes by the general feebleness of poetic expression. Most of the versifiers of the early eighteenth century had no particular facility of expression except in copying the Popean couplet. This is obviously not adapted to romantic outbursts. Hence many ideas, feelings, descriptions, which in the hands of Wordsworth, Kéats, or even Thomson would impress us with their romanticism, seem, in those of poets unskilled in the expression of such things, merely tame and imitative. This awkward dumbness in the presence of beauty and emotion is particularly markt in the nature poetry of the time. James Haywood, for example, whose love for the country appears thruout his letters, who says, "The beautiful Wildness of Nature opens to me a more agreeable Scene, than the most study'd Elegancies of Art,"<sup>1</sup> expresses himself thus when he drops into verse:

"Here fragrant Blossoms, Palm, and shady Bow'rs,  
There spreading Laurel, and full blooming Flow'rs . . .  
There shady Trees are rang'd in beauteous Rows:  
Scene after Scene does charm my wond'ring Eyes,  
Where-e'er I look I see new Prospects rise . . .  
And Nature's pencil'd Works my soul amaze."<sup>2</sup>

Again, in *The Vision* by Samuel Croxall (1715) we find what seems to be a real love for the out-of-doors:

<sup>1</sup> *Letters and Poems on Several Subjects*, 2d ed., 1726, p. 71: letter dated June 19, 1712. Cf. p. 80 (August 30, 1712), "In the cool of the Evening, I took a Walk . . . and came to a small Cottage delightfully shaded with Trees, which had the Prospect of a murmuring Stream, that gently glided along; being wonderfully delighted with the gay Prospects of flower'y Meadows, and being captivated with the Beauty and Retirement of the Place, I sat down under a shady Covert."

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.*, pp. 11-12.

"Pensive beneath a spreading Oak I stood  
 That veiled the hollow Channel of the Flood:  
 Along whose shelving Bank the Violet Blue  
 And Primrose Pale in lovely mixture grew.  
 High over-arch'd the bloomy Woodbine hung,  
 The gaudy Goldfinch from the Maple sung;  
 The little warbling Minstrel of the Shade  
 To the gay Morn her due Devotion paid:  
 Next the soft Linnet echoing to the Thrush  
 With Carols fill'd the smelling Briar-bush."<sup>1</sup>

Of course this is not Wordsworth; yet the passage reveals a genuine love for nature and a power for expressing this love. But Croxall could not maintain such a style for long; immediately after these lines we have the following:

"While *Philomel* attun'd her artless Throat . . .  
 Attent I listen'd while the Feather'd Throng  
 Alternate finish'd and renew'd their Song; . . .  
 I gained the Margin of a verdant Mead; . . .  
 Here every Flow'r that Nature's Pencil draws  
 In various Kinds a bright Enamel rose."

Conventional and perfunctory, are they not? Should we not say, if we had not seen the preceding passage, that the author cared nothing for nature and was only tamely repeating phrases that he had read? This, I imagine, is what is generally thought of Gay; yet let us read carefully a passage in his *Rural Sports*:

"No warbling cheers the woods; the feather'd choir  
 To court kind slumbers to their sprays retire;  
 When no rude gale disturbs the sleeping trees,  
 Nor aspen leaves confess the gentlest breeze;  
 Engag'd in thought, to Neptune's bounds I stray,  
 To take my farewell of the parting day;  
 Far in the deep the sun his glory hides,  
 A streak of gold the sea and sky divides;

<sup>1</sup> *Ib.*, pp. 3-4.

The purple clouds their amber linings show,  
 And edg'd with flame rolls every wave below;  
 Here pensive I behold the fading light,  
 And o'er the distant billows lose my sight."<sup>1</sup>

Is it too much to say that we have here, hampered by the Popean couplet, disfigured by stiff, conventional phraseology, but still recognizable, a genuine if not intense love of nature, and a hint of the feelings aroused in her presence?

With this passage we may compare two from Thomson which have probably imprest most readers as romantic. The first, except that it deals with autumn instead of twilight, is in subject-matter not unlike the extract from Gay:

"Thus solitary, and in pensive guise,  
 Oft let me wander o'er the russet mead,  
 And through the saddened grove, where scarce is heard  
 One dying strain to cheer the woodman's toil.  
 Haply some widowed songster pours his plaint,  
 Far, in faint warblings, through the tawny copse."<sup>2</sup>

"A pleasing land of drowsy-head it was,  
 Of dreams that wave before the half-shut eye;  
 And of gay castles in the clouds that pass,  
 Forever flushing round a summer-sky."<sup>3</sup>

The great difference between these passages, which impress us as romantic, and the one from *Rural Sports*, which seems classic, lies, as appears to me, in Thomson's greater power of expression. And it is here that Thomson's significance in the romantic movement is to be found. He was a classicist and, like the average classicist, had certain romantic leanings; but he was no more romantic than

<sup>1</sup> I, ll. 95-106.

<sup>2</sup> *Autumn*, ll. 970-6.

<sup>3</sup> *Castle of Indolence*, I, vi.

hundreds of Englishmen of his day.<sup>1</sup> He had, however, what they did not have, independence and a power of expression. He was not afraid to say what he felt and he was able to say it memorably. There were plenty of his contemporaries who had feelings and ideas, such as are expressed in the passages above, but to whom, in their slavish following of the fashion, it may not have occurred to express them, or who, if the suggestion came, may have lacked the poetic power to carry it out effectively. In many cases they were dumb poets who never thought of versifying. Thomson, then, was not a man with a new message, so much as one gifted with the power of expressing feelings and thoughts not unusual but unfashionable.

A striking illustration of the way in which fashion dominated what was to be expressed in verse is found in the case of Gray. Every one knows of Gray's love for nature; he is the stock example for the beginnings of romanticism. "To spend a week at Keswick is for him to be 'in Elysium.' He kept notes, too, about natural

<sup>1</sup>He was probably more of a romanticist than any other poet of the day, but not more than others who did not write. It should be remembered that, though strongly romantic along some lines, Thomson was decidedly classic along others. He was, in the main, a quiet conventional man, an intimate friend of many of the leading classicists, including Pope, whom he admired, and like them was a deist. There is nothing of the Byronic revolt or morbid individualism about him, no airing of private griefs in his poetry. The element of reason is prominent and, as Professor Neilson has pointed out (*Essentials of Poetry*, pp. 138-42), *The Seasons* departs from classicism not by being romantic but by being realistic. We may regard *The Castle of Indolence* as romantic, while holding that its author is classic; for "rather than purely an expression of individual temperament" (*loc. cit.*, p. 139) it is a *tour de force* of the kind that even Pope might have written. A study of all of Thomson's works will make clear that he was fundamentally classic.

history, which seem to show as keen an interest in the behavior of birds or insects as that of White of Selborne himself. And yet his sensibility to such impressions has scarcely left a trace in his poetry, except in the moping owl and the droning flight of the beetle in the *Elegy*. The Spring has to appear in company with the 'rosy-bosom'd hours,' and the Muse and the insects have to preach a pathetic little sermon to justify the notice which is taken of them."<sup>1</sup> If it were not for Gray's prose, someone would be writing of him, "The shy recluse had no interest in nature except in her broad, general aspects; when he speaks of her it is in the stereotyped, conventional phraseology of the day; he evidently knew her only thru his books and felt little of the joy of wandering in the fields." We happen to know how absurd such a statement as this would be, but is it any more absurd than what is actually said about men whose letters and journals, if they wrote any, have not been preserved? Should we not, then, drop our assumption that eighteenth-century poetry, particularly the best poetry, represents adequately eighteenth-century life and thought? Should we not be more cautious in basing conclusions on that poetry alone?

It may have been inferred from what has already been said that I myself do not accept the current ideas as to the lack of feeling for nature in the first half of the eighteenth century. There can be no question that between Pope's and Wordsworth's attitude towards nature there is a deep gulf. But here again we are by no means warranted in assuming that the attitude of a sickly, crippled satirist is that of the entire country. There are

<sup>1</sup> From Sir Leslie Stephen's *Hours in a Library*, article on *Gray and His Friends* (New York, 1884, III, p. 137) which contains a number of sound observations on eighteenth-century romanticism.

many men to-day who would agree with Boswell, tho they might be ashamed to acknowledge it, that a twilight-walk in a park is "not equal to Fleet-street." On the other hand, there have always been men and women who loved nature; English poetry from Anglo-Saxon times to Milton shows a keen feeling for it.<sup>1</sup> Are we to believe that all Englishmen suddenly ceast to care for their daisied fields, the great elms and birches that shaded their homes, the glory of the sun and moon, the dewy morning, the mysterious twilight, the song of the lark and the cuckoo? Did no one feel with the Anglo-Saxon Seafarer the spell of the ocean? No reasonable person thinks these things; and yet any indication of a real love for nature or of a close observation of it is eagerly pointed to as another streak of the romantic dawn. It should be frankly acknowledged, however, that most of the *poetry* of the period shows little genuine love for the out-of-doors. But this, as I have tried to make clear, is by no means the same as saying that the Englishmen of the time had little of this love. One might as well assert that, because a person can neither sing nor play an instrument, he is no lover of music! We are repeatedly making the mistake of confusing emotion with its expression. Miss Reynolds, for example, in her standard work on the subject writes: "Real affection for Nature even in her idyllic forms, an

<sup>1</sup> Milton's poems, though showing little close observation, reveal a delicate sensitiveness to the broad aspects of nature. It should be remembered that in the marvellous passage in which he laments his lost sight he speaks first of

"Day, or the sweet approach of even or morn,  
Or sight of vernal bloom, or summer's rose,  
Or flocks, or herds, or human face divine."

Marvell, who died in 1678, certainly had a deep feeling for nature.

affection the evident outgrowth of personal experience, is the exception rather than the rule. When such regard for Nature is apparent, however narrow in scope, it is rightly to be regarded as an indication of a new feeling toward the external world.”<sup>1</sup> I fail to see anything new in a “real affection for Nature.”

Nor are expressions of such affection rare in the classical period. Professor Phelps, Miss Reynolds, and others have given instances of them, and many more could easily be found. It may not be amiss, however, for me to add a few of the passages that have come under my notice. A poem, *A Winters' Thought* by “Mr. E——,” interesting and pretty enuf in itself, gains significance from the fact that it was publisht in *The Gentleman's Magazine*<sup>2</sup> and accordingly represents what the editor thought the people would like. Omitting the first four and two other stanzas, we read as follows:

“Not only in the waving ear,  
And branches bending with their load,  
Or while the produce of the year  
Is gather'd in, and safely stow'd.

Pleas'd in the year's decline, he sees  
The fading leaf diversify'd  
With various colours, and the trees  
Strip and stand forth in naked pride.

Each hollow blast, and hasty shower,  
The rattling hail, and fleecy snow,  
The candy'd rhyme, and scatter'd hoar,  
And isicles which downward grow. . . .

The sun, which from the northern signs  
Scorch'd with unsufferable heat,  
Now in a milder glory shines,  
And every glancing ray is sweet.

<sup>1</sup> *Loc. cit.*, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> February, 1731.

The silver moon, and every star,  
 Now forth to full advantage shine,  
 And, by the richest scene, prepare  
 For noblest thoughts th' enlarged mind. . . .

And when the winter tedious grows,  
 And length'ning days cold stronger bring,  
 An unexhausted pleasure flows  
 From expectation of the spring."

Lady Mary Wortley Montague, the close friend of Pope, who, Professor Phelps says, "represents even better than Pope and Addison the limitations of the Augustan days,"<sup>1</sup> writes in 1716: "Within a few hours' space of time one has the different diversion of seeing a populous city adorned with magnificent palaces, and the most romantic solitudes, which appear distant from the commerce of mankind, the banks of the Danube being charmingly diversified with woods, rocks, mountains covered with vines, fields of corn, large cities, and ruins of ancient castles."<sup>2</sup> And again two years later: "Alas! art is extinct here, the wonders of nature alone remain; and it was with vast pleasure I observed those of Mount Etna, whose flame appears very bright in the night many leagues off at sea, and fills the head with a thousand conjectures."<sup>3</sup> In

<sup>1</sup> *The Beginnings of the English Romantic Movement*, pp. 14, 15.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters and Works*, Bohn ed., 1898, I, p. 112.

<sup>3</sup> *Ib.*, I, pp. 256-7. Cf. II, pp. 77, 128, 173, and 464, opening lines of *Verses, Written at the Chiosk*. The following passage seems particularly worthy of note (II, p. 160): "I am now in a place the most beautifully romantic I ever saw in my life: . . . vast rocks of different figures, covered with green moss, or short grass, diversified by tufts of trees, little woods, and here and there vineyards, but no other cultivation, except gardens like those on Richmond-hill. The whole lake, which is twenty-five miles long, and three broad, is all surrounded with these impassible mountains, the sides of which, towards the bottom, are so thick set with villages . . . that I do not believe there is anywhere above a mile distance one from another, which adds very much to the beauty of the prospect."



*A Journey through England*, which was publisht in 1714, we read: "But whether you gently step over my Favorite Meadows, planted on all sides quite to the *Woodcot* Seat, in whose long Grove I oftenest converse with myself; Or that you Walk further on to *Ashted House* and Park, the sweetest Spot of Ground in our *British* World; or Ride still further to the Enchanting Prospect of *Box hill*, that Temple of Nature, no where else to be equaled for affording so Surprising and Magnificent an Idea both of Heaven and Earth: Whether you lose your self in the Aged Yew-Groves of *Mickleham* . . . I that love the country entirely. . ." <sup>1</sup> Another English traveller to whom the natural beauties of his native island gave genuine pleasure was William Stukeley. Stukeley frequently mentions the noble "prospects" to be seen from the hills, as well as the quieter beauties. He writes, for instance, of "vast woods covering all the sloping side of the hill, whose wavy tops when agitated by the wind entertain the eye with a most agreeabl spectacl." <sup>2</sup> And two pages later, "Bewdly is a pleasant town by sweet meadows upon the Severn, which is the most delightful river I have seen . . . near it is a pretty rock upon the edg of the water, cover'd with Nature's beautiful canopy of oaks and many curious plants." One passage, in which he speaks of riding along the seashore, is especially interesting. "Nothing," he writes, "could be more entertaining in this autumnal season, when the weather is generally clear, serene and calm. much sea tithymal grows

<sup>1</sup> Pp. 85-6. The complete title of the work, which is anonymous, is *A Journey Through England. In Familiar Letters from a Gentleman Here, to his Friend Abroad.*

<sup>2</sup> *Itinerarium Curiosum. Or, An account of the Antiquities and Remarkable Curiosities in Nature or Art, Observ'd in Travels thro' Great Britain*, 1724, p. 69.

here, and a very pretty plant . . . the murmur of the ocean has a noble solemnity in it.”<sup>1</sup> This appreciation of the sea is particularly significant because it is rare at this time. Wild scenery, mountains, the ocean, and the other grand and terrible aspects of nature seem not to be often mentioned with appreciation. Any general love of wildness is apparently not found until later. Yet it is highly improbable that Gray’s well-known enthusiasm was unique or that he was the first to feel such enthusiasm.<sup>2</sup> It has, I think, been generally forgotten that it was as early as 1739 that the Alps made their profound impression upon Gray. Addison, whose lack of feeling for nature has been greatly over-emphasized, was by no means indifferent to mountain scenery. In his *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy*, written in 1705, he says, “The fatigue of our crossing the Appenines . . . was very agreeably relieved by the variety of scenes we passed through. For not to mention the rude prospect of rocks rising one above another, of gutters deep worn in the sides of them by torrents of rain and snow water, or the long channels of sand winding about their bottoms . . . we saw, in six days’ travelling, the several seasons of the year in their beauty and perfection.”<sup>3</sup> “Mount Pausiclypo,” he notes, “makes a beautiful prospect to those who pass by it”;<sup>4</sup> and again, “In sailing round Caprea

<sup>1</sup> *Ib.*, p. 119.

<sup>2</sup> In his *Journal in the Lakes* he records (October 13, 1769) that a landscape painter and two engravers had spent some time at Gordale-scar before he arrived there.

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, New York, 1854, II, p. 217. The passage continues as follows: “We were sometimes shivering on the top of a bleak mountain, and a little while after basking in a warm valley, covered with violets and almond-trees in blossom, the bees already swarming over them, though but in the month of February.”

<sup>4</sup> *Ib.*, II, p. 263.

we were entertained with many rude prospects of rock and precipices, that rise in several places half a mile high in perpendicular.”<sup>1</sup> Instances of the kind could easily be multiplied.<sup>2</sup> As to the Alps, a reading of Mrs. Montague’s letters will make clear that passing through these or other mountains was in those days a thing to be dreaded; Lady Mary was appreciative of mountain scenery when it could be enjoyed under favorable circumstances. Of course, there is little evidence of the spiritual communion with nature that marked Wordsworth’s poetry. Nor can it be doubted that a love for “God’s out-of-doors” was not as fashionable, not as much talked about, hence not as general as it has been at other times. But, as has been previously shown, one should be careful of concluding that because a poet speaks of nature in the conventional phraseology of the day, he has no real feeling for it. It should also be borne in mind that there are thousands of persons for whose communion with nature no poet has acted as priest.

We have seen, I hope, that the possession of a genuine love for nature is not enough to prove that an author is romantic. We may find that the same thing is true of another not unusual quality that has come to be regarded

<sup>1</sup> *Ib.*, II, p. 259. Three pages earlier he describes “one of the pleasantest spots I have seen. It is hid with vines, figs, oranges, almonds, olives, myrtles, and fields of corn, which look extremely fresh and beautiful, and make up the most delightful little landscape imaginable.” Passages like those quoted abound in the *Remarks*.

<sup>2</sup> For example, in the *Letters from Mrs. Elizabeth Carter to Mrs. Montague*, 1817, I, pp. 2, 3, written August 14, 1756: “This charming country . . . a country wildly and pleasingly romantic.” And I, p. 27, written March 13, 1759: “I longed for you extremely the other night at Reading, to ramble by moonlight amongst the ruins of an old Abbey.” A letter of Mrs. H. M. Chapone, written in 1770, shows marked enthusiasm over the wildness of Scotland (*Works*, Boston, 1804, I, p. 121).

as a touchstone of romanticism,—interest in animals and sympathy for their sufferings. When we read Thomson's attacks on caging birds, and hunting, and such moving descriptions as that of the bird returning to feed her young, only to find the nest vacant, we are likely to conclude "another proof that he is a romanticist." But do we really believe that no one before him had qualms about hunting? had been moved by the pathetic cries of a dying hare? that tender-hearted men and women at any period did not feel for helpless birds mourning near their despoiled nests? Do we suppose there was no woman in Pope's time who, like the Prioress, was

"So charitable and so pitous  
She wolde wepe, if that she sawe a mous  
Caught in a trappe, if it were deed or bledde" ?

"Pitee," as Chaucer tells us, "renneth sone in gentil herte." It has always done so; human beings who have possest any feeling worth mentioning have always felt for animals. Gay, whose classicism has never been questioned, says,

"Around the steel no tortur'd worm shall twine,  
No blood of living insect stain my line."<sup>1</sup>

And Mrs. Montague, on December 6, 1712, wrote her husband: "a good-natured robin red-breast kept me company almost all the afternoon, with so much good humour and humanity as gives me faith for the piece of charity ascribed to these little creatures in the Children in the Wood."<sup>2</sup> Addison, too, in one of his *Spectator* papers<sup>3</sup> said: "I value my Garden more for being full of Black-

<sup>1</sup> *Rural Sports*, close of Canto I.

<sup>2</sup> *Loc. cit.*, I, p. 77.

<sup>3</sup> No. 477; September 6, 1712.

birds than Cherries . . . By this Means I have always the Musick of the Season in its perfection, and am highly delighted to see the Jay or the Thrush hopping about my walks, and shooting before my Eye."

As a thoro-going classicist is supposed to pay little attention to animals, so he should have rather a contempt for folk-tales, popular beliefs, and superstitions. The exaltation of reason at the expense of imagination, the emphasis on finish and propriety, play havoc with old wives' tales. Pope and his followers, accordingly, might be expected to look down on the popular literature as they lookt down on the popular drama.<sup>1</sup> Yet what a child learns at his nurse's knee is long remembered, and we have Addison's *Spectator* papers on *Chevy Chase* and on *The Fairy Way of Writing*<sup>2</sup> as instances of how national and natural tastes may triumph over theory. There are, indeed, scattered over the meadows of eighteenth-century poesy, many fresh, green circles where the light feet of the fairies have toucht. Over a few of these bright spots we may well pause for a moment. In William Diaper's *Dryades* (1713) we read,

"Where airy Demons dance the wanton Round;  
Where fairy Elves, and midnight *Dryads* meet,  
And to the smiling Moon the Sylvan Song repeat. . .  
Here Dryads in nocturnal Revels join,  
While Stars thro shaking leaves obscurely shine."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pope apparently did so; to be sure, there are fairies in the *Rape of the Lock* but they are satiric, intellectual sylphs who lack the atmosphere, the charm, of fairy land. In 1723, Pope wrote to Mrs. J. Cowper, "I have long had an inclination to tell a fairy tale, the more wild and exotic the better . . . provided there be an apparent moral to it" (*Works*, ix, p. 431). The concluding clause shows Pope's real interest and how far he was from the true spirit of the fairy tale.

<sup>2</sup> Nos. 70, 74, 419; May 21, 25, 1711, July 1, 1712.

<sup>3</sup>P. 3.

Thomas Parnell has a pretty poem, *A Fairy Tale, in the Ancient English Style*<sup>1</sup> which shows at once interest in Chaucer, the Ballads, and fairy lore. It begins,

"In Britain's isle and Arthur's days,  
When midnight faeries daunc'd the maze,  
Liv'd Edwin of the green."

Similarly, Thomas Tickell's *Kensington Garden* (1722), a poem of about five hundred lines, shows not a little airy grace and charm in recounting the loves and hates of the fairies. "I," he writes,

"The tale, that sooth'd my infant years, impart. . .  
And sing the battles, that my nurse inspir'd."

A number of passages of the kind might be given, but one more must suffice. It is from *The Vision* of Samuel Croxall, which has already been quoted:

"Here, if we credit Fame, the *Faery Court*  
Nightly frequent in Festival Resort;  
The little *Elfin Train* attend their Queen,  
And in light Gambols frisk it o'er the Green."<sup>2</sup>

Sir Leslie Stephen has written, "Walpole is almost the first modern Englishman who found out that our old cathedrals were really beautiful."<sup>3</sup> Any one who is as deeply indebted to the *Dictionary of National Biography* as I will hesitate to differ from its great editor, yet here he must be mistaken. On the face of it, it is incredible that there were not many persons, hundreds, thousands of them, who felt the beauty of England's noble churches. If one's first view across the transept of York towards

<sup>1</sup> This must have been written before July, 1717, when Parnell died.

<sup>2</sup> P. 5. Cf. pp. 7-8. *The Vision* was published in 1715.

<sup>3</sup> *Hours in a Library*, New York, 1894, I, p. 371.

those superb windows, the "Five Sisters," almost takes one's breath away to-day, surely it must have made some impression two hundred years ago. If the mouldering grandeur of Tintern and Fountains Abbeys and the slender spire of Salisbury linger long with us as precious memories, did not our forefathers see in them something that was lovely? And surely if that superficial fop, that gossip-monger, Horace Walpole, saw beauty in the Gothic, others did. Fortunately, we know they did. Addison, even though he had a pronounst preference for classical architecture, certainly admired and enjoyed the Gothic. In his journey through Italy in 1701-3 he saw, between Pavia and Milan, a church "extremely fine, and curiously adorned, but of a Gothic structure."<sup>1</sup> It is noteworthy, as showing that there were others who cared for the Gothic, that he had heard much of the Cathedral at Milan and expected to be more impressed with it than he was.<sup>2</sup> Of Siena he wrote, "There is nothing in this city so extraordinary as the cathedral, which a man may view with pleasure after he has seen St. Peter's, though it is quite of another make, and can only be looked upon as one of the master-pieces of Gothic architecture."<sup>3</sup> The depreciatory tone in which this comment ends is typical of the eighteenth-century attitude in the matter. Addison thought that as the classic temples were perfect; nothing so unlike them as the Gothic cathedrals could be good art. Yet he liked the cathedrals. Pisa he also saw: "The great church, baptistery, and leaning tower," he wrote, "are very well worth seeing."<sup>4</sup> The cathedral of Berne

<sup>1</sup> *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy, etc.*, II, p. 152.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ib.*, II, p. 313. The nine or ten lines which follow are hostile to the Gothic.

<sup>4</sup> *Ib.*, II, p. 318.

he thought "perhaps, the most magnificent of any Protestant church in Europe out of England. It is a very bold work, and a master-piece in Gothic architecture."<sup>1</sup> In his edition of Spenser, which was published in 1715, John Hughes defends the plan of the *Faerie Queene* thus: "To compare it . . . with the models of Antiquity would be like drawing a parallel between the Roman and the Gothick architecture. In the first there is, doubtless, a more natural grandeur and simplicity; in the latter we find great mixtures of beauty and barbarism, yet assisted by the invention of inferior ornaments; and though the former is more majestick in the whole, the latter may be very surprising and agreeable in its parts." This comparison, it should be noted, tho showing the qualified admiration of Addison, implies that the beauties of the Gothic were generally recognized.<sup>2</sup> In *A Journey through England* (1717), which has already been quoted, Canterbury Cathedral is called: "One of the finest *Gothick* Buildings that I ever met with."<sup>3</sup> The most hearty appreciation of Gothic that I come upon is in William Stukely's *Itinerarium Curiosum* (1724). Stukely's love of the Gothic appears whenever he sees a church. A few of his utterances may be quoted. Lichfield Cathedral "is a very handsome pile . . . which appears very majestic half a mile off."<sup>4</sup> Bath he calls "a beautiful pile" and the priory church of Great Malvern "very large and beautiful, with admirable painted glass in all the win-

<sup>1</sup> *Ib.*, II, p. 350.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Herbert Cory's "The Critics of Edmund Spenser" (*University of California Pub. in Modern Philology*, II, 2, p. 147). The admiration for Spenser, which Dr. Cory shows to have been general in the early eighteenth century, is another indication that the classicism of the time was not as rigid as it has been thought.

<sup>3</sup> P. 59; cf. p. 312, *supra*.

<sup>4</sup> P. 57.



dows.”<sup>1</sup> Of Gloucester he writes, “from the tower, which is very handsome, you have a most glorious prospect eastward thro’ the choir finely vaulted at the top, and the lady’s chappel to the east-window, which is very magnificent.”<sup>2</sup>

If the native English taste triumpht over classical theories in such matters as interest in animals, folk poetry, fairies, and Gothic architecture, it probably asserted itself in other places also; for example, in meter. The classical school undoubtedly used the heroic couplet more than any other form of verse. This fact, and the nature of the couplets used, which are admirably adapted to Pope’s kind of poetry and ill suit any other, has led us naturally enuf to regard classical poetry and the couplet as almost synonymous. We speak of the literature of the couplet and mean the poetry of Queen Anne’s time. We forget that Swift wrote almost excusively in octosyllabics, and that Gay’s well known *Fables* are in the same meter: we forget that flood of Pindarics which poured forth upon every occasion; and still more do we forget that there was considerable blank verse, and some of it very popular, written at this time. I have found over a hundred unrimed poems publisht between 1700 and 1739. A number of these are among the more important poems of the time. There is, for example, John Philips’s oft-reprinted and widely praised *Splendid Shilling*, which appeared in 1701, and his much admired *Cyder* which was publisht seven years later; there were a number of pieces by the beloved Isaac Watts (1706-7);<sup>3</sup> there were

<sup>1</sup> Pp. 138, 65; cf. Hereford, p. 67, etc.

<sup>2</sup> P. 64.

<sup>3</sup> *The Celebrated Victory of the Poles over Osman* (*Works*, 1810, iv, pp. 474-6), *To Mitio* (*ib.*, iv, pp. 482-5), *An Elegaic Thought on Mrs. Anne Warner* (*ib.*, iv, pp. 492-3), etc.

Somerville's *Chace* (1735), and Glover's popular *Leonidas* (1737) which "made" its printer, Dodsley; and then there was Akenside's famous *Pleasures of Imagination* (1744). But most of all, there were three of the most widely read works of the day, Thomson's *Seasons* (1726-30), Blair's *Grave* (1743), and Young's *Night Thoughts* (1742-5).

A fair idea of what the average poetaster of the time was doing may be gained from the miscellanies. An examination of twelve of these <sup>1</sup> shows that of 764 poems, 361, or less than half, are in the heroic couplet, and that 334 are either in octosyllabics or stanzas. These volumes contain few Pindarics, probably because the effusions of this name were usually published in folio sheets and were too stupid to be reprinted. In this respect the miscellanies seem not to be representative, but, disregarding it, we find the octosyllabic and stanzaic poems combined almost as numerous as the couplet.<sup>2</sup> The domination of the latter was never as complete as it has been pictured. Even Prior seriously questioned if he had not made a mistake in writing his most ambitious work, *Solomon on the Vanity of the World* (1718), in "heroic measure." He wrote: "As Davenant and Waller corrected, and Dryden preferred it, it is too confined: it cuts off the sense at the end of every first line, which must always rhyme to the next following; and consequently, produces too frequent an identity in the sound, and brings every couplet to the point of an epigram. It is indeed too broken and weak, to convey the sentiments and represent the images proper for epic. And, as it tires the writer

<sup>1</sup> I took all the Harvard University Library possesses in this period, rejecting those largely devoted to well known authors.

<sup>2</sup> This shows the folly of maintaining that Milton's minor poems caused any *revival* of the octosyllabic in the middle of the century.

while he composes, it must do the same to the reader while he repeats; especially in a poem of any considerable length . . . but once more: he that writes in rhymes, dances in fetters.”<sup>1</sup> There was indeed, in some places, even an hostility to the couplet. The most significant utterance to this effect is from an undoubted classicist whose satires closely resemble Pope’s, Edward Young. Young’s *Conjectures on Original Composition* was published in 1759, altho its author’s feelings regarding the couplet may well have been formed in 1742, when the first of his blank-verse *Night Thoughts* appeared. Speaking of Pope’s *Homer* he writes, “What a fall is it from Homer’s numbers, free as air, lofty and harmonious as the spheres, into childish shackles, and tinkling sounds! . . . Had Milton never wrote, Pope had been less to blame; but when in Milton’s genius, Homer, as it were, personally rose to forbid Britons doing him that ignoble wrong; it is less pardonable, by that effeminate decoration, to put Achilles in petticoats a second time . . . . Must rhyme, then, say you, be banished? I wish the nature of our language could bear its entire expulsion: but our lesser poetry stands in need of a toleration for it.”<sup>2</sup> Clearly the couplet did not have things all its own way even in the days of Pope.

<sup>1</sup> Preface to *Solomon*.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, III, pp. 194, 203.

In February, 1773 (XLII, p. 95), *The London Magazine* publishes the following extract from *A Poetical Epistle on the English Poets, chiefly those who have Written in Blank Verse*:

“Go mark the fetter’d sons of Gallia’s clime  
Where critic rules, and custom’s tyrant law,  
Have fetter’d the free verse. On the pall’d ear  
The drowsy numbers, regularly dull,  
Close in slow tedious unison. . .”

It may seem that in calling attention to the feeling for nature in Gay and Addison, to their use of blank verse, to the sympathy for animals of the one and the admiration of Gothic architecture of the other, I am trying to prove they were really romantic. Quite the contrary is the case. A great deal of confusion has, in my opinion, been brought into the subject by the improper use of such characteristics as these. They have often been regarded as so many pieces of litmus paper, which, when applied to a writer, would automatically determine whether he were romantic or classical. We should remember that these characteristics are not new and strange, but old and inherent; we should not be surprised to meet them, we should be surprised not to meet them. Every writer of the period, so far as I know, was classical in the proper sense of that term as applied to English literature. He may have written octosyllabics and some blank verse, he may have shown an interest in popular literature and superstitions, a feeling for animals, and a love for nature, and yet be accepted by us as indisputably classical. In the same way, later writers may exhibit these qualities and yet have not the slightest significance as regards the gradual breaking down of the classical supremacy.

An illustration of the folly of this method of external tests is shown in its crowning absurdity, that of placing William Cowper among the romanticists. Cowper does show the growth toward romanticism; but he was far from a romanticist. He was a proper, conventional man, preëminently the poet of domestic happiness, of the simple, uneventful side of country life. His idea of pleasure was drinking tea and singing psalms with ladies, his purpose in writing verse was professedly didactic (and he seldom lets us forget this purpose), his love for nature,

even, was for the familiar and cultivated, "well-rolled walks" and

"Nature in her cultivated trim  
Dressed to his taste."<sup>1</sup>

Where is the mystery, the picturesqueness, the vague longing, the revolt, the scorn of rule and reason, and the exaltation of untrammelled imagination which are the heart of romanticism? To be sure, one has a perfect right to define classicism so as to exclude Cowper. The objection to such a definition is that it emphasizes the smallest and least significant phase of the movement. The modified, more flexible classicism, English classicism as distinguished from French, became widely disseminated and profoundly affected English letters. The strict root-and-branch variety was largely a theory; a theory, it may be, that has found more expounders in the twentieth century than it had followers in the eighteenth. If, however, one prefers to use the term classical in English literature only in its narrow, extreme sense, one must certainly cease to apply it to the age of Pope. If one excludes Thomson and Cowper from the classicists, one must exclude many more, one must exclude most of the Englishmen of their times. Rigorously classical as the days of Queen Anne may seem to us, we have but to dig a short way beneath the surface to find the fundamental romanticism of the English people, a romanticism generally obscured, often concealed and scorned, but none the less vitally affecting whatever grew on the somewhat foreign and arid soil above it.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Task*, I, l. 351, III, ll. 357-8.